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F O R T U N E S W A S H E D A W A Y

"MOUNTAIN FARMING"

Broadcast No. 34 in a series
of discussions of soil con-
servation in the Ohio Valley.

WLW, Cincinnati

December 17, 1938 6:00-6:15 p.m.

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE
Dayton, Ohio

SOUND: Thunder, followed by rain...

ANNOUNCER

Fortunes Washed Away!

ORGAN: I GET THE BLUES WHEN IT RAINS.

ANNOUNCER

The towering Unaka Mountains of North Carolina look down on peaceful Carter County, Tennessee. Rhododendron and redbud, hardwood and conifer, cover the mountains. Ages ago this was a vast solitude where nature sowed and reaped her own crops. But today, hill farmers sow and reap their crops--on hill land, for there are no rich lowlands. And how to farm the hills without losing the soil is a nettling problem to the rugged mountain farmers--a problem that faced Newt Clark, a hill farmer as rugged as the Unaka Mountains. One day three years ago, Clark had a visitor, John Ewing, the assistant county agricultural agent...

SOUND: Clinking of large stones being placed together.

EWING (fading in)

Looks like you're building up the road a little, Mr. Clark.

CLARK

Oh, hello, Mr. Ewin's. I thought that was you driving up, but I wasn't sure. Yeah, them last rains tore hit up right smart. Got these here rocks down by the creek, and I aim to fix hit up to stay.

EWING

I don't know a lot about road-building, but I can tell you're doing a good job of it.

SOUND: Clinking stops.

CLARK

Yeah, but hit's shore a job. Long's you're here, let's go down in that pasture yonder. I want you to look at them steers I bought t'other day.

EWING

Sure, let's do that. Are they good ones?

CLARK

Well, now, I hain't real shore, but I do believe I wish I'd bought another one. Here, now...sic calf, sic calf...

SOUND: Steer snorts and runs off.

CLARK

Aw! Come back here! He's right smart skittish.

EWING

He'll get over that, after you've had him awhile. Looks like a good one, Mr. Clark.

CLARK

Yeah, I do believe I should have bought another one while I was at hit.

EWING

Maybe so, but you've got a good start. Well, I guess you know what I came out to see you about. You know, I asked you in the office the other day, if you'd be willing to use your farm as a demonstration unit here in Simerly Creek township.

CLARK

I'll swear, I don't know what to tell you, Mr. Ewin's. I hain't give hit a lot of thought, to tell you the truth.

EWING

I think it'd be to your advantage. You're sorta looked upon as a leader around here, and....

CLARK

Well, here's the p'int, Mr. Ewin's. Just what'd I have to do?

EWING

For one thing, I'd like to see some strip cropping started around here. That's one of the best methods of keeping these hills from washing.

CLARK

Hain't nobody 'round here ever tried hit yet.

EWING

Not here in Carter County, but it's being used a lot in other parts of the country. You've seen Zimmerman's, over in North Carolina, haven't you?

CLARK

You mean that preacher? No, but I've heard about hit. Listen, Mr. Ewin's, if'n I had \$150 a month and five acres of tobacco I could make my farm strippy too. But all I get is what I get off'n this land.

EWING

That's one reason I want you to try strip cropping. You'll show people that it'll not only save them money, but save the soil as well.

CLARK

Well, now, listen. You see that old field over there?

EWING

Yes...

CLARK

I've been here for 36 year now, and that old field is the worst I've got. Course, hit's idle now. Ain't payin' nary a thing, and I'd like to get something off'n hit. I can't even get grass to grow on hit. Now, if you want to farm hit in strips, I'm willin'.

EWING

All right, Mr. Clark, I'll take you up on that. You know, at the Treaty of Watauga, one of the Indians told Daniel Boone: "Brother, we have given you a fine land, but I believe you will have much trouble in settling it." Now, that Indian meant trouble with the Indians...but the biggest trouble today is keeping the land from washing away...and Mr. Clark, you're going to show the folks around here how to do it!

ORGAN: PLOW SONG.

ANNOUNCER

John Ewing laid out that idle land in alternate strips of meadow and corn, liming and fertilizing the field heavily to insure a catch of grass. Many neighboring Simerly Creek farmers laughed at the "strippy farming," as they called it, but many more came around to Newt Clark's home to see this new type of erosion control. One Sunday...

SOUND: Four or five bars closing a mountain song, played on a guitar.

SOUND: Scattered applause, laughs, and comment.

MRS. MCKINNEY

Now, don't let them fool you, Mr. Woodby, that was fine. You sure can play that guitar.

WOODBY

Thanks, Mrs. McKinney. Comin' from a schoolmarm, I reckon as how that means something. Didn't hear you say nothin', though, Newt.

CLARK

Oh, sure, sure, that was a good number, Woodby. And I'm right glad you dropped by, too. I wanted to show you how my strip farming is comin' along.

WOODBY

I've been wonderin' about that, Newt. And say! What's that green stuff growin' on them scalds?

MRS. McKINNEY

Yes, what is that, Mr. Clark? I noticed it from the road. Why, last year that was nothing but a lot of gullies...like I have on one of my fields.

CLARK

Well, now, that's a long story.

MRS. McKINNEY

I don't care how long it is. Maybe I can do the same thing you did.

WOODBY

You'd never think it was the same field, all right.

CLARK

I'll tell you. That field over there I forgot about. I didn't even want to see hit. But Mr. Ewin's, he said we could fix hit up, and I reckon he was right. He just showed me how to cave in the sides of them gullies, and we put a lot of lime and phosphate on hit.

WOODBY

But I didn't think nothin' would grow there. Last year when I walked across that field, it was washed down to the clay.

CLARK

Shore hit was. But after that lime and phosphate had been on hit awhile, we sowed some lespedeza on hit. That's the green stuff you see--lespedeza.

MRS. McKINNEY

Lespedeza? Yes, I've heard that it's a mighty good soil builder.

WOODBY

But you're not agoin' to cut hay from it, are you? Looks like it's still mighty thin.

CLARK

No, Mr. Ewin's says that hit's best suited for trees, like hit was in the beginnin', and we're goin' to plant black locust trees in there. That way, we won't have no more gullies, and we'll be able to get some fence posts off'n that field in a few years. Course, I had to fence hit off to keep the cows out.

MRS. McKINNEY

But how about that strip farming, Mr. Clark? Does it really keep the soil from washing?

WOODBY

Yeah, after all, that's what we came over to see.

CLARK

And you'll see hit, soon's we get a bite to eat, and dinner'll be ready in almost no time. But now listen, when I say anything, I mean percisely what I say. And I'm tellin' you, this strip cropping may look funny at first, but hit's going to turn out to be the best thing that ever did hit these here hills. Strip croppin' may look funny, but hit's a durn sight prettier'n a bunch o' gullies!

ORGAN: LOVELY TO LOOK AT.

SOUND: Occasional bird call, through following...

CLARK (fading in)

...and you'll see for yourself just how the soil is kept up there where it belongs.

MRS. MCKINNEY

...and if we do, we'll learn a lesson we never had in the schoolroom.

SOUND: Dog barking frantically, as he chases rabbit.

WOODBY

Hey! The 'pup's after a bunny!

CLARK

Yeah, but he's just a little dog. Never catch him. But that's the way things go. We're always lookin' and chasin' after somethin' that seems a little too much for us. But we learn as we go along...and some of these days we'll catch up. Now you take this strip farmin'...hit's changed my whole system of hill farmin'. I looked a long time for hit...but I've got hit now.

EWING (shouting in distance)

Hey! Wanta wait for me?

MRS. MCKINNEY

Who's that?

WOODBY

Mr. Ewing, ain't it?

CLARK

Yeah, that's Mr. Ewin's all right.

EVERYONE

(mingled greetings)

EWING

How are you, everybody? Hello, Mr. Clark.

CLARK

Mr. Ewin's, we was just going up here to look at the strips. Glad you came out.

EWING

Well, Mrs. Ewing and I were just up in the mountains for a little picnic lunch, and I thought I'd stop by.

CLARK

Won't she come on up with us?

EWING

No, she's waiting in the car.

WOODBY

Nowt here was just asayin' that strip farming is provin' a heap of good about saving his soil from awashin'.

CLARK

Well, now, if I'd had that hill broke this year, hit'd done been gone. Hit'd just have got up and walked away.

WOODBY

But how about your yields? Looks to me like you're cuttin' down on them, leaving all of these strips in grass.

CLARK

Mr. Ewin's, what's the average corn yield here in Simerly Creek township?

EWING

About 20 bushels to the acre this year, Mr. Clark.

WOODBY

I think that's about what my corn runs.

MRS. MCKINNEY

I don't think I got any more than that.

EWING

And what did your strip cropped field run, Mr. Clark?

CLARK

Gentlemens, I got 37 bushel off of this strippy field, and hit's my poorest field at that. I reckon I got just as much corn off the strips as if the whole field was plowed.

WOODBY

Here's something I've never seen before. That grassed draw, there.

How come you didn't plow through it?

CLARK

That was Mr. Ewin's idea. I just told my boy Homer, when he plowed this field, to lift the plow when he come to that there draw. Hit's no use in talkin', a man ought not to break a holler.

EWING

That's right, Mr. Clark. You'd have had a gully down through there if you had.

CLARK

And here's something else, now. Look at these strips of grass. They're what's goin' to keep the water and the soil up here where they belong. And remember, we get a lot of floods down Simerly Creek. But here's where the floods start. The more water we can keep up here, the less we'll have down yonder. Of course, some of the folks still laugh at my strips. Some people won't even stop 'n' look at 'em--afraid they'd lose a minute and lose a dollar. But me--all I got is just this hill farm. All my livin' comes off'n this here land. And if strip farmin' will hold this land, well, Homer and Joss and the other boys will have hit some day, long after I'm gone. You see old Unaka Mountain up there? She's been there a long, long time. She's a part of this here country--she belongs here. And that's the way I feel about this soil. Hit belongs here. Let's keep hit here.

ORGAN: LULLABY OF THE LEAVES.

ANNOUNCER

So, Newt Clark's resolute desire to keep the good land good is typical of thousands of rugged hill farmers--men who must farm the hills to survive--but must farm them with care to keep the soil at home. Through strip cropping, these men have found a way to cultivate the hill land and protect it at the same time.

ORGAN: LULLABY OF THE LEAVES.

ANNOUNCER

And now, here is Gene Charles of the Dayton, Ohio, office of the Soil Conservation Service. Gene, don't you think we ought to go right on with a discussion of strip cropping?

CHARLES

That's a good idea, _____. It was through an energetic assistant county agent, John Ewing, that Newt Clark was able to learn about strip cropping. And now, Newt Clark tells us that he is going to farm all of his steep land in that fashion in the future.

ANNOUNCER

But doesn't it take a lot of technical knowledge to apply strip cropping to sloping fields?

CHARLES

No, it doesn't take a lot of technical knowledge, and it doesn't take a large cash outlay, either. Tom Kennard ought to be able to give us the answers to any questions on this subject. T. C. Kennard, of the Dayton office of the Soil Conservation Service, supervised the farm plans drawn up for approximately 5,000 farmers who are cooperating with the Service in the Ohio Valley region. _____, if you have any questions on strip cropping, now's your time to speak up, for Professor Tom Kennard is on the stand.

ANNOUNCER

Gene, I'm going to leave that up to you, but don't be surprised if I come in with a question or two later on.

CHARLES

All right, the Professor is warned. Tom, before you get in too deep, maybe you'd better explain just what strip cropping is, for the benefit of those who haven't met it first hand.

KENNARD

I can do that much, but first, let me throw off this mythical cap and gown you've given me. I'm just an ex-farmer working with farmers, and a lot of those farmers have found out, through experience, a lot more about strip cropping than I can tell you.

CHARLES

But their experience has been a happy one, hasn't it?

KENNARD

Very much so. They've found that this practice is simple, inexpensive, and quite effective in reducing soil losses on certain slopes.

CHARLES

But now, getting back to the original proposition--just what is strip cropping?

KENNARD

Under this method of farming, contour strips of erosion-resisting crops, usually meadow, are alternated with similar bands of cultivated crops. Each strip is handled as a separate field and rotated so that the clean-tilled strip is adjoined on each side by meadow.

CHARLES

And the width of these strips?

KENNARD

The width varies from 50 to 150 feet, depending upon the steepness and length of the slope, the rotation to be followed, the soil type, and the amount of erosion that has already taken place. And remember, to be effective, cultivation and seeding practices must be on the contour as nearly as possible, and the erosion-resisting strip must form a good sod cover.

ANNOUNCER

Now, here's where I come in with a question. How can a farmer learn how to lay out his strips?

KENNARD

There are a number of ways. It's always a good idea to see his county agent. But then lots of farmers have laid out their strips without any outside help. Then there's that bulletin...

CHARLES

And there's where I come in with an answer. Information on strip cropping as a means of conserving farm land is available in a U. S. Department of Agriculture Farmers' Bulletin. This publication, "Strip Cropping for Soil Conservation," is in popular language and contains up-to-date information on the subject.

ANNOUNCER

Then copies of the bulletin may be obtained...

CHARLES

By writing to Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio, and asking for the bulletin on strip cropping.

ANNOUNCER

All right, that concludes my cross examination.

KENNARD

Well, I think I have a rebuttal coming. Remember, strip cropping is proving to be highly effective as a soil-saving measure. To be effective, though, the strips should not be too wide, and they should keep as close to the contour as possible. And as Newt Clark pointed out, if a draw runs through the field, it's a good idea to leave the entire draw in sod. As Newt said, "It's no use talking, a man ought not to break a hollow." Among the advantages of strip cropping, besides the reduction of soil losses, are a frequent increase in yields and farm income, reduction of fertilizer costs, and economics in farm power, which result from cultivation on the level. And, finally, strip cropping will work on almost any type of sloping land.

CHARLES

That's a powerful argument you put up, Tom Kennard, and thanks a lot for your suggestions. I know that this spring, when farmers all over the country begin to plow their land, they'll be thanking you for this information. And as for you, _____, if you'd be good enough to remind everyone that...

ANNOUNCER

If you would like a copy of the bulletin, "Strip Cropping for Soil Conservation," drop a letter or a penny postcard to Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio. Next week, "Farming With Terraces."

SOUND: Thunder, followed by rain...

ANNOUNCER

Fortunes Washed Away is a studio presentation of the agriculture department of the Nation's Station.

